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TAGS: PREL PGOV PINR IS KPAL
SUBJECT: MOD DG BUCHRIS ON WEST BANK AND GAZA

REF: TEL AVIV 1177

Classified By: Ambassador Richard H. Jones. Reason 1.4 (B/D)

¶1. (C) Summary: The Ambassador met with MOD Director General (DG) Pinchas Buchris to reaffirm MOD support for ongoing efforts to promote Israeli-Palestinian security cooperation in the northern West Bank. The Ambassador offered to assist the MOD should they require U.S. forensic expertise to identify remains of Israeli soldiers killed in Lebanon that were recently returned to Israel. He asked the MOD and IDF for assistance in helping the USG better understand how to coordinate efforts to facilitate the movement of Palestinian students in and out of Gaza. Buchris informed the Ambassador that a Government of Israel (GOI) decision on next steps in Gaza had been postponed until after PM Olmert's return to Israel on June 6; hence, Political-Security Director MG (res.) Amos Gilad would not travel to Cairo beforehand. Buchris confirmed to the Ambassador that the Israeli Air Force will submit a letter of request (LOR) for further information on the land-based Phalanx Counter-Rocket, Artillery, Mortar (C-RAM) system for possible use along the Gaza periphery. End Summary.

NORTHERN WEST BANK PILOT PROJECT

¶2. (SBU) The Ambassador opened by thanking DG Buchris for his efforts in facilitating the Bethlehem Investment Conference (BIC) in May. Regarding other quality-of-life initiatives in the West Bank, the Ambassador recounted a recent discussion he had had with MOD Military Secretary BG Eitan Dangot, who had promised to outline in writing what sort of steps the GOI was taking regarding checkpoints in the West Bank. The Ambassador also shared with Buchris a U.S. Security Coordinator (USSC) generated assessment regarding some thirty patrols or incursions by the IDF into the Jenin area of the northern West Bank over the past three weeks. The Ambassador noted that during the May 4-20 period, the PA had arrested some 85 individuals while Israeli security forces had detained 27.

¶3. (SBU) DG Buchris responded "quality was as important as quantity" and reiterated GOI concerns about a "revolving door" policy by the PA. Nonetheless, he said "we appreciate what the Palestinians are starting to do," and he hoped that they would start tackling terrorist cells in the Jenin area. Noting that the northern West Bank pilot project was chiefly the IDF's purview, he turned to J5 Col. Shimon Arad, who remarked that the USSC data contradicted IDF information (only five incursions since the pilot project began o/a May 4). Arad also claimed that the Palestinians are pleased with coordination with the IDF: "We're allowing them to work anywhere they want; we're not hindering them." Arad mentioned only two areas where the IDF required advance coordination (near the security barrier and near the Dotan A and B settlements); otherwise, "coordination occurred on an

hourly basis between COGAT and the Palestinians." Arad indicated that the PA had actually arrested nearly 130, mostly criminals and car thieves, which he said had generated a very positive atmosphere in the Jenin area. He opined that PA counter-terrorism activity remained "very limited."

¶4. (C) The Ambassador asked whether the IDF was sharing intelligence on terrorist cells with the PA security forces. Col. Arad affirmed that they had shared "bits of information" with them, and underscored that the Major General Gadi Shamni of the IDF Central Command had ordered this information flow to continue. Arad also noted that Central Command was formulating recommendations this week regarding other cities where the IDF could allow greater Palestinian responsibility. Buchris added that it was the security establishment's intention to give responsibility to the Palestinians in areas where the separation barrier is complete. Buchris and Arad added that the Palestinian security forces have been allowed greater freedom of movement to the Jordan Valley, both in buses and in a number of licensed, individual vehicles.

¶5. (SBU) Col. Arad advocated a continuity of presence regarding Palestinian security forces deployed in the Jenin area. Depth of Palestinian engagement in a locality was more important than geographic expansion, in his view, and should be married with economic initiatives that would necessarily be long-term in duration. Arad noted that some 220 of the initial 680 Palestinian security forces, including some Presidential Guard units that had received training in Jordan, had been dispatched to Bethlehem for the BIC. Regarding the NSF battalion that has just returned from training in Jordan, Col. Arad posited that it should be deployed as an organic battalion working in a defined structure, i.e. in the Jenin area. Arad said that the Palestinians were considering deploying part of the NSF to Jericho as a rapid deployment force and sending others back to Jordan for further training.

¶6. (SBU) Regarding economic initiatives, Buchris affirmed that the GOI would permit Israeli Arabs to travel to Jenin. "We won't publish it, but will grant permission (for them) to go." Buchris claimed that the German initiative in the Jenin area was going "smoothly" and that electricity and water infrastructure had been provided. "If there are any problems with Jenin projects, come to this table and we'll resolve it," Buchris promised the Ambassador. Buchris noted, however, that he had not approved a private silo project, which might have created a monopoly that could have contributed to corruption in the region. Regarding a proposed Turkish hospital project near Tarkumiya, Buchris acknowledged that this was a complex and sensitive project and that the security services were not enthusiastic. Nonetheless, he said the MOD would put forward a possibly positive recommendation to the government soon.

SHORT RANGE ROCKET DEFENSE

¶7. (C) Director General Buchris told the Ambassador that the Israel Air Force (IAF) will submit a letter of request (LOR) for further information on the Counter-Rocket, Artillery, Mortar (C-RAM) system, with the stated intent of looking to purchase a few of the LCMR radars, primarily to help with mortar detection and warning. Buchris indicated that for now they are not interested in the land-based Phalanx gun, mostly because of the difficulties inherent in deciding where to locate the guns and the psychological effect of having the sound of a gun firing off in populated areas, for example next to a school. The Ambassador informed Buchris, who appeared unaware, that the C-RAM gun does not sound like a standard machine gun. He explained that the sound is more of a buzzing sound, and this should not deter them from considering the gun for protecting the population. Buchris appeared further interested after learning this.

¶8. (C) Buchris also stated he hopes the U.S. and Israel will work on the Light Blade solid state laser system together in

a cooperative effort. He explained that U.S. assistance will lead to a quicker development of the system. The Ambassador explained that for the Rafael-developed Iron Dome system, it will help the U.S. greatly to have more detailed information on how the Israelis plan multi-year funding internally. This information will demonstrate a commitment from the Israelis that will help the U.S. to determine whether or not to aid in the full production funding. Buchris indicated that he would be meeting with Minister of Defense Barak on this soon and would make that point clear.

Palestinian Students - Gaza

¶9. (C) In conclusion, the Ambassador asked Buchris and Lt. Col. Beaudoin of the office of the Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories (COGAT) to help us better understand how to convey coordination requests to facilitate the movement of Palestinian students into and out of Gaza. Beaudoin claimed that the system was not broken and that Major General Mishlev of COGAT -- not the Israeli Embassy or MFA -- should remain the focal point for U.S.-Israeli coordination. Beaudoin indicated that COGAT had recently facilitated a number of USAID requests successfully in this manner, but he did not address why FY2007 Fulbright grantees or other long-pending grantees, still have not been permitted to exit Gaza for visa interviews and onward travel.

When the Ambassador asked whether educational exchanges of this sort constituted a humanitarian case and whether it raised operational or policy questions in the eyes of the IDF and MOD, neither Buchris nor Beaudoin provided a definitive answer. (Note: As reported reftel, COGAT Commander MG Mishlev told the DCM June 3 that the GOI does not count students among the humanitarian cases eligible to leave Gaza under Israel's current restrictive policy.)

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JONES